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Educational Television Series 1968-69

Teachers' Guide

DEPT. OF EDUCATION
HISTORICAL COLLECTION



Professional Development

Patterns in Language

Educational Television Branch
ONTARIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
1670 Bayview Avenue, Toronto 17

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PATTERNS IN LANGUAGE

5 programs, 20 minutes each.

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Please address inquiries and comments to:
Assistant Superintendent,
Professional Development,
Education Section,
ETV Branch,
1670 Bayview Avenue,
Toronto 17.

INTRODUCTION

It has been said that children in our schools learn "space-age" science, the "new" mathematics, and "old" grammar. Like most generalizations, this statement is subject to any number of modifications, and there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that at best it overstates its case. However, it does emphasize an important point. In the areas of science and mathematics the twentieth century has seen an explosive expansion of knowledge. And this expansion has been reflected, to some extent, in the curriculum of the school. There has been, during this century, a great deal of scholarly activity within the language area. It is the complaint of the linguist that very little of what has been discovered about language seems to have found its way into the schools.

If this is true, there are valid reasons for it. Linguistics is a relatively new term. Most of us are not too sure of its meaning, although we assume that it has something to do with the study of language. But language study is not a twentieth century innovation; the writing of grammars, for instance, is a very ancient pastime. The grammarians were like the modern linguists in that they attempted, as a result of their observations, to describe language and to give it form and structure. Etymologists have pursued the history of single words, sometimes compiling dictionaries.

But the modern linguist bears little resemblance to the grammarian or etymologist of former years. He shares, with the scientist, the revolutionary twentieth century climate within which enquiry and learning take place. In fact, the linguist is a scientist, for linguistics is usually defined as the science of language. The linguist pursues his study using the rigorous method of the physicist or mathematician. He observes, classifies, analyzes, and predicts. Ostensibly, he has no ulterior motive, and therefore brings no desire for common standards, no wish to impose a form or structure upon us. It may be that there are ultimate aims in his mind, perhaps to help us use language more efficiently as a means of communication; nevertheless, he recognizes his major task as inquiry.

What has the language scientist learned as a result of all this activity? He has, in fact, learned a good deal, and for the layman who reads the published work in this field, there are rich rewards. Perhaps it is not so much the scholarly learning that fascinates us, but rather the discovery that language is so complex a subject, so much a part of our history, and our social mores. Seeing language through the mind of the linguist is an exhilarating experience.

The pity is that we know so little about it. Surely if we knew more, our language curriculum and method would be enriched. The linguist has things to tell us about language which may be of considerable value in our teaching. Perhaps the teacher and the linguist should be brought together.

In a modest way these programs attempt to do just that. However, they are not didactic in nature; they are not meant to present a body of information about linguistics or to teach, in any systematic way, a thorough understanding of the subject. They are, rather, a kind of initial experience, an introduction to linguistics presented in an informal manner.

Each program will have two parts. During the first part of the program Professor Michael Kay, Director of Linguistics and Language Training at York University, will talk about language with a group of eight-year old children. Then, a panel of adults who have observed the conversation will discuss it with Professor Kay. This panel includes the following: Professor John McInnes, Director of Language and Learning Project, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education; Mr. Alec Allinson, Project Officer, Language and Learning Project, O.I.S.E.; Mrs. Roberta Charlesworth, Coordinator of English, North York Borough Board of Education. The conversations are not aimless; there is a point to be made although it is not heavily stressed in each program. The purpose is to arouse interest and a desire to learn, not to indoctrinate.

Useful References

BAILEY, DUDLEY, ed. *Introductory Language Essays.* Norton, 1965.

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BOLLINGER, DWIGHT. *Aspects of Language.* Harcourt Brace, 1968.

GLEASON JR., H. A. *Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics.* (Second Edition, Revised), Holt Rinehart Winston, 1961.

HALL JR., ROBERT A. *Linguistics and Your Language.* Doubleday Anchor, (A201), 1960.

LANGACKER, RONALD W. *Language and Its Structure.* Harcourt Brace, 1967/68.

PROGRAM I

LANGUAGE IS SOUND

This program will emphasize the fact that oral communication among persons depends upon a system of sounds refined and standardized so that they have meaning for the listener. These sounds, put together with other sounds in meaningful patterns, enable us to communicate our thoughts to each other.

However, a large number of different sound systems or languages have been developed throughout the world. If we are not familiar with a particular language, the sounds which make up that language are meaningless for us. They are, in fact, just noise. This fact is most obvious in the case of languages which have little apparent relationship to each other, for instance, English and Cantonese.

notes

PROGRAM 2

LANGUAGE IS WRITING

Primarily, language is sound. It begins and is developed as a method of oral communication, going no further than this stage in some societies. Writing is a secondary and independent development, which follows only when societies discover a need for it.

Writing is something separate from sound. It has an internal organization developed on its own terms. Yet, since this organization is intended to represent in visual terms our spoken language, it is carefully correlated with it.

A writing system involves much more than an attempt to find a visual code for our sounds. Spoken language is composed not only of words but of pauses, of rising and falling inflections, and the many other ways by which we attempt to communicate our meaning.

notes

PROGRAM 3

LANGUAGE VARIES

Within the global community there are many different varieties of language structures. This is an obvious fact which is proved whenever one hears such languages as Russian, Chinese, or French being spoken. Not so obvious, perhaps, are the variations which may exist within a single language. We are familiar, of course, with the variations in dialects — local differences in sounds, vocabulary, and sentence structures. Such variations are usually related to geographical location.

There are other reasons for language variation. For instance, what constitutes acceptable language? The answer may depend, in part, upon the social, economic or cultural group to which we belong. The educated person may speak a form of English which in pronunciation, structure and vocabulary is far removed from the English spoken by the illiterate. It is important for us to accept such differences and to be wary of condemning children because they use the accepted language of their cultural background.

notes

PROGRAM 4

LANGUAGE IS UNIVERSAL AND ARBITRARY

This program stresses the fact that English is just one language among hundreds. People everywhere use language to communicate, and all languages serve the purposes of those who have developed them.

As we have seen in the previous program, language varies. So great is the variation that it is almost impossible to believe that there are many similarities which perhaps are more important than the differences. In this program, some of the similarities will be discovered during an examination of the structure of language.

notes

PROGRAM 5

LANGUAGE IS NEUTRAL

Program three, "Language Varies", made the point that there are differences in spoken language which arise from differences in environment or location. These differences make it difficult to determine one "acceptable" standard of language. Previously, it had been suggested that we should be wary of condemning a language that is "different". This program pursues this theme a little further. It stresses that language in itself has no moral value. It is "good" or "bad" only to the degree that it provides a useful or viable means of communication. The implication for us, as teachers, is in the nature of our attitude toward language teaching, or rather toward language development. A child who says "He done it" may not be using "acceptable" language, but he certainly is not guilty of moral wrong-doing. Language development demands a positive, non-punitive approach on the part of teachers.

notes

Scheduling for this series can be found in the monthly ETVO SCHEDULE sent to all teachers. For long-term planning, reference can be made to the ETV Schedule (Calendar), which lists programming from October to June and was mailed to all teachers. However, it is most important to check the monthly ETVO SCHEDULE for the last minute changes always involved in extensive programming.

PATTERNS IN LANGUAGE